

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 10, 2021

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

We are writing to respectfully request that you revise the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) new Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan to include recommendations to conserve mature and old growth forests on National Forest System lands as a central climate strategy. Protecting older, carbon-rich forests is a simple and cost-effective strategy for mitigating climate change and adapting to future climate impacts. USDA has already recognized these values in the Tongass National Forest, as demonstrated by your commitment to end large-scale old growth logging. We appreciate that the Climate Adaptation and Resilience Plan highlights the importance of strategic implementation of hazardous fuel treatments and prescribed fire to reduce wildfire risks and to increase forest restoration. However, in light of the worsening climate crisis, it is imperative that the U.S. expand that effort and optimize the climate value of mature and old growth forests throughout the country.

The impacts of climate change are becoming more dire, with observable effects already occurring in every corner of the country and impacts disproportionately borne by our most vulnerable communities. Our ability to pull carbon from the atmosphere and store it for the long term will play a major role in determining the severity of the future impacts of climate change. It will take time and significant federal investment to decarbonize the electricity sector and electrify the transportation sector. Protecting our natural carbon sinks represents a more straightforward climate solution that can be implemented much sooner.

Mature forests are also an invaluable climate adaptation tool. The extensive root systems of older forests slow and filter rain, prevent erosion, and help reduce the risk of flooding in watersheds across the country. The thick bark and tall trunks of mature forests also helps separate the forest canopy from fast moving fires along the ground, making older forests more resistant to wildfire impacts. Current logging practices can have long-term detrimental impacts on hydrology and

watershed health, underscoring the need to conserve remaining mature and old growth in essential watersheds.

Allowing logging of mature and old federal forests should become a practice of the past. Logging the last remaining mature and old growth forests in the U.S. would undermine the objectives laid out in President Biden's Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad* and his administration's efforts to protect 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030 for biodiversity conservation and urgent climate mitigation action. In the U.S. National Determined Contribution announced earlier this year, the administration specifically recommended forest protections as a key climate strategy. We urge USDA to follow through on these commitments by ensuring mature and old growth protections are central to the agency's climate strategy.

Sincerely,



Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
United States Senator

Cory A. Booker
United States Senator

Edward J. Markey
United States Senator

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

Martin Heinrich
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Alex Padilla
United States Senator

Patty Murray
United States Senator

Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Ruben Gallego
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Emanuel Cleaver II
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Nanette Diaz Barragán
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Lisa Blunt Rochester
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Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Barbara Lee
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Suzanne Bonamici
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Chellie Pingree
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Adam Smith
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Mike Thompson
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Sara Jacobs
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Karen Bass
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Steve Cohen
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Jahana Hayes
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Diana DeGette
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Nikema Williams
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Jerry McNerney
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Jamie Raskin
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Mike Levin
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